

**Opening Statement of Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia**

Hearing: "U.S. Security Concerns in Central Asia"

Thursday, October 26, 2005 at 10:30 a.m. in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

The terrorist events of September 2001 brought a profound and lasting transformation to U.S. policies and priorities toward the countries of Central Asia. Regions and nations that had been at the periphery of concern have taken on new importance because of the threat posed by terrorists and the states that sponsor them.

Expanding U.S. security engagement and cooperation with Central Asian States has been viewed as a key mechanism to promote their integration into Western political-military institutions, encourage civilian control over militaries, and institutionalize cooperative relations with the United States military, while dissuading other parties — such as Russia and China — and threats to U.S. national security — particularly Iran — from seeking to dominate the region.

However, this approach to Central Asia must also continue to be focused on the central tenet that freedom and democracy are long-term antidotes to terrorism, instability and economic stagnation, a position that Secretary Rice reiterated to the leaders of those countries in her visit to the region earlier this month.

In this respect, there are legislative efforts to increase assistance to bolster independence and reforms in Central Asia and to leverage and condition other U.S. programs and security assistance on progress on the human rights front.

This Subcommittee has previously held hearings on these issues but questions remain, however, about what constitutes the appropriate balance between competing U.S. priorities.

This hearing seeks to address the security component of our bilateral relationships with the countries in Central Asia, focusing on terrorism and proliferation, while placing the discussion into a broader policy context that takes into account other U.S. policy equities.

On the one hand, the March 2005 popular revolt ended President Askar Akaev's authoritarian fourteen-year rule and gave the people of Kyrgyzstan the opportunity to take their fate into their own hands and provide themselves with a chance for democracy.

However, the new leaders face significant obstacles. It is imperative that the constitutional council drafts its new constitution in open partnership with parliament and the full range of society by the end of the year.

I remain concerned by the assassinations of politically recognized people have taken place since the deposition of the former regime, along with other aspects of potential political instability.

Thus, Kyrgyzstan remains a vivid example of the need to strengthen our efforts to support reformist and democratic governments and entities in Central Asia.

In Uzbekistan, in the aftermath of the Andijon massacre, the government of the country has expanded its policies that target innocent civilians and reformers, and has enacted further policies that have only exacerbated security problems.

After the United States, the U.N., and others interceded so that refugees who fled from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan could fly to Romania, Uzbek authorities, on July 29th, demanded that the United States vacate the K2 airbase within six months.

This event marked the first time that a U.S. ally has not only abrogated its commitments in the war against terror but has expelled American servicemen from its territory.

In response, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns on August 2nd asserted that the Administration “made a clear choice, and that was to stand on the side of human rights,” even though the Administration “knew” that the Uzbek government would then demand that the base be vacated.

The situations represented by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are but a microcosm of current challenges in the region. However, we must also identify potential problems and sources of concern before they evolve into threats to U.S. national security, our interests and our close friends and allies.

Such an approach is authorized through legislative provisions in the 9/11 bill enacted last year regarding U.S. policy actions on terrorist sanctuaries, as well as multilateral terrorism interdiction efforts.

Earlier this year, the Department of State issued an advisory to Americans noting ongoing security concerns and the potential for terrorist actions in Central Asia. This announcement summarizes well the developments regarding terrorism in the region.

The April 29th advisory said: “Elements and supporters of extremist groups present in Central Asia, including the Islamic Jihad Group, Al-Qaida, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, have expressed anti-U.S. sentiments in the past and have the capability to conduct terrorist operations in multiple countries.”

It further stated that: “Previous terrorist attacks conducted in Central Asia have involved the use of improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers and have targeted public areas, such as markets, local government facilities, and the U.S. and Israeli

Embassies in Uzbekistan. In addition, hostage-takings and skirmishes have occurred near the Uzbek-Tajik-Kyrgyz border areas.”

The Subcommittee would appreciate a threat assessment regarding terrorist organizations and extremist groups operating in the region, to include their organizational structure, sources of support, and capabilities.

We would also appreciate it if our witnesses would advise us if there are specific countries in the region that the U.S. would classify as terrorist sanctuaries. To this extent, has the Administration has considered implementing Section 7102 of the “9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act” regarding the countries of Central Asia?

As you know, this section of the 9/11 Act would be triggered if governments in the region know of the use of their territory for terrorist activities and are allowing it to continue.

Are the governments engaged and cooperating with the U.S. to prevent the use of their territory as a terrorist sanctuary?

What do you believe would be the impact on our relations with those nations if the Administration extends restrictions on certain exports to countries meeting the designation of terrorist sanctuary?

We are also interested in the status of proliferation in the region, the existence of unconventional weapons programs, and the occurrence of ballistic missile trafficking.

Major U.S. security interests have included the elimination of nuclear weapons remaining in Kazakhstan, for example, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. There are active research reactors, uranium mines, milling facilities, and nuclear waste dumps in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, many of which reportedly remain inadequately protected.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan reportedly had significant chemical and biological warfare facilities during the Soviet era.

U.S. efforts to dismantle chem-bio and nuclear facilities in the region to prevent terrorists from procuring these deadly weapons is a priority concern for this Subcommittee.

What actions are we taking and considering in conjunction with the countries of Central Asia regarding the interdiction of unconventional materials and technologies? How are these agreements structured?

More broadly, we would appreciate it if Assistant Secretary Fried would describe on what our security policy and our priorities are toward the region, and how do those priorities translate into activities, operations, programs, and assistance.

The U.S. approach to the question of Central Asia not only must represent a multifaceted effort that integrates the military, political, and economic components of U.S. policy -- both as incentives and reprimands -- but a prospective approach that identifies and addresses potential threats before they become malignant.

As Machiavelli wrote: "Political disorders can be quickly healed if they are seen well in advance...when, for lack of diagnosis, they are allowed to grow in such a way that everyone can recognize them, remedies are too late."

I would like to thank our distinguished witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today.